

Ford Fund Withholds Support For Police-Panther Inquiry

By William Chapman
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A highly publicized private investigation of clashes between police and Black Panthers has been stalled for three months because anticipated financial support from the Ford Foundation never came through.

Concern with political repercussions in Washington and publicity over foundations' tax-exempt status may have affected the Ford Foundation's decision not to get involved with the controversial Panther issue, one member of the investigating commission said.

However, Mitchell Sviridoff, national affairs vice president for the foundation, said not even an informal agreement had been reached to provide funds, although some discussions had been carried on.

Asked whether the foundation drew back from the discussions because of the project's potential for political controversy, Sviridoff said, "The negotiations never reached that stage."

At least two members of the commission, however, said they felt the Ford Foundation had informally promised to contribute about \$100,000 to finance the investigation.

It was on the basis of that presumed promise, they said, that such prominent members of the commission as former Attorney General Ramsey Clark and former Supreme Court Justice Arthur Goldberg agreed to serve.

One member familiar with the negotiations said, "They (the foundation) certainly created the expectation that the money would be forthcoming, although it was never a solid pledge."

"I think the tax reform act had a lot to do with it—that and the congressional pressure last October."

He was referring to the controversy which swirled on Capitol Hill last year when many congressmen criticized the political and social-action nature of grants made by large foundations. Conservatives, in particular, objected to financing of such projects as a Cleveland civil rights group's voter registration campaign and a Mexican-American group's activities in Texas.

The tax reform law ultimately placed a 4 per cent excise tax on foundation earnings, prohibited any use of foundation funds to influence legislation and restricted their support for voter registration drives.

Subsequently, in the Ford Foundation's annual report, President McGeorge Bundy wrote that despite such criticism it would continue to support projects of social change in the 1970s.

"We cannot align ourselves with those who believe there is no crisis in our society," he wrote.

The investigating commission was announced last Dec. 15 after a series of violent clashes across the country. The most recent had been the Dec. 4 shooting by police of two Illinois Black Panther Party leaders in a West Side Chicago apartment.

Twenty-eight civil rights leaders, prominent lawyers and church officials joined the "commission of inquiry."

Goldberg and Roy Wilkins, executive director of the NAACP, said they were "profoundly concerned" by the clashes in Chicago and Los Angeles which, they added, "have raised grave questions over the whole range of civil rights and civil liberties as applied to the Black Panthers."

In each of the clashes, police contended they were attacked by Panthers in the course of legal searches.

Since the December announcement, the commission has held one meeting, which only a few members attended. It has been unable to hire a staff and has made no extensive inquiries in any city.